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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: ALN EMERGES AS DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE

REF: A. MANAGUA 2615
[1](#)B. MANAGUA 2567 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)C. MANAGUA 2548
[1](#)D. MANAGUA 2470
[1](#)E. MANAGUA 0556

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4(b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance's (ALN) second place finish to the FSLN in the November 5 presidential elections broke a 16-year political party duopoly in Nicaragua and thrust to the forefront an organization committed to democratic change. The election results and recognition by the Liberal International have given the ALN the political and moral momentum to claim the status of the principal opposition party to the FSLN. Along the way, however, the ALN must overcome continuing challenges from the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC), separatist tendencies from its constituent organizations, and internal opportunists seeking to form new pacts for power and personal benefit. End Summary.

Psychological and Practical Benefits of Montealegre Second-Place Finish

[1](#)2. (SBU) After the elections, ALN contacts were disappointed by the FSLN victory, but optimistic that the young party will be able to take the reigns from the PLC as the principal opposition force in the country. ALN presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre's second-place finish shattered the 16-year pattern of poor third-party performances and proved that the ALN is a vital national force capable of mounting a campaign and defending its votes. The ALN's success caused considerable upheaval and soul-searching in the PLC, even as Montealegre reaffirmed his position that the ALN will not ally with a PLC controlled by party boss and convicted money launderer/embezzeler Arnoldo Aleman. Many local PLC leaders began questioning which party represents the future of Liberalism in Nicaragua.

[1](#)3. (U) On November 11, Liberal International officially inducted the ALN into its ranks, sending another signal that the international community regards Montealegre and the ALN as the legitimate standard bearers of Liberalism in Nicaragua. (Note: The PLC was expelled in 2005 over the Aleman case. End Note.)

[1](#)4. (C) As the "second power" in Nicaragua, the ALN will enjoy the authority under the Electoral Law to name officials in the Departmental and Municipal Electoral Councils (CEDs and CEMs). ALN director Eliseo Nunez stated on November 25 that

the ALN will obtain 76 CEM and eight CED presidencies (slightly less than half) when the electoral bodies are restructured six months before the 2008 municipal elections. (Note: After Nunez' comments, Montealegre announced that the ALN will support changes to the Electoral Law that professionalize the assignment of electoral officials. End Note.) PLC spokesman Leonel Teller disputed Nunez' claim, based on the PLC's superior results in the National Assembly deputy elections, but CSE officials informed OAS and EU observers on separate occasions that the CSE will use the presidential vote results to determine which party is the "second power."

ALN Surges on the Atlantic Coast

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¶15. (U) PLC leaders repeat ad nauseum that their party has a stranglehold on the rural vote, especially on Nicaragua's remote Atlantic Coast (Ref D). In just eight months, however, the ALN managed to make dramatic gains on the Coast. In the RAAN, the ALN increased its percentage of the vote from 5.4% to 18.31%, and in the RAAS, ALN support doubled from 15.4% to 30.71%.

¶16. (U) Comment: While a significant percentage of the ALN increase came at the expense of the PLC, most of the votes came from the indigenous Yatama party. Yatama leaders formally allied with the FSLN, but dissidents, such as Comandante Blas, broke away and joined the ALN with most Yatama voters. The ALN was less successful, however, in making inroads into deep-rural, PLC strongholds in the northern departments, where the PLC radio stations bombarded residents with its Montealegre smear campaign, including announcing just days before the election that Montealegre had withdrawn his candidacy under U.S. Embassy pressure. End Comment.

Internal Threats to ALN Unity

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¶17. (C) The ALN is an alliance comprised of several parties and movements, some elements of which have made separatist noises for personal benefit or to maintain party identity. ALN deputy candidate and titular president of the Nicaraguan Resistance Party (PRN) Salvador Talavera announced on November 7 that he would seek to form an independent caucus of PRN members in the new National Assembly. On September 15, Talavera betrayed the ALN and signed an agreement with the FSLN while refusing to renounce his ALN candidacy. Even though he is running on a national slate of ALN candidates, Talavera claimed that he owes the ALN "nothing," only the people who elected him. According to Salvador Talavera's brother, Jose Angel Talavera, who was elected to the Central American Parliament on the ALN ticket, the FSLN threatened to send Salvador to jail for abusing his former wife unless he "cooperated" with the FSLN. (Comment: The FSLN likely honeyed the threat with a substantial cash bribe that Talavera needed to pay off his considerable debts. End Comment.)

¶18. (C) The ex-Resistance members that could presumably join Talavera's caucus are: Indalecio Rodriguez, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, and Talavera from the ALN; Brooklin Rivera and Elia Maria Galeano from the FSLN; and Maria Auxiliadora Aleman and Adolfo Calero from the PLC. (Comment: None of these deputy candidates is likely to join a caucus headed by Talavera, who many -- including his own brother Jose Angel -- now regard as a traitor. The formal formation of a caucus requires a minimum of four deputies. End Comment.)

¶19. (C) Another threat to ALN unity may come from a principal component of the Alliance: the Conservative Party (PC). During a meeting with polcouns, PC president Azalia Aviles reported that, according to PC statutes, the party deputies must form their own caucus in the National Assembly if possible. (Note: the PC has five deputies-elect, enough to form a caucus. End Note.) Polcouns urged Aviles to discuss the matter with Montealegre, as a public break with the ALN

would be a severe blow to the Alliance. On the margins of Montealegre's November 28 breakfast meeting with A/S Shannon (Ref A), Aviles informed polcouns that for now the Conservative Party will remain as part of the ALN caucus in the National Assembly, but told her on December 2 that many PC members feel marginalized by Montealegre and are pushing for a separate caucus.

Comment: Building a Party for the Future

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¶10. (U) In addition to reaffirming that the ALN will not join or ally with a PLC controlled by Arnoldo Aleman, Montealegre continues to portray the ALN as a party that supports democratic development, both for Nicaragua and internally. On November 23, he announced that ALN deputies will not be allowed to take any other role in the party leadership structure and must "dedicate themselves fully to legislative work." On other occasions, Montealegre has pledged to support democratic reforms at the expense of the majority political parties' power.

¶11. (C) Montealegre and other ALN leaders will have to both work on maintaining unity among the constituent groups and resist old-school operatives (such as Nunez) who would use the ALN's new clout to perpetuate the patronage systems traditionally enjoyed by the majority parties. If they fail, the independent voters and other constituencies (such as the evangelicals - see Ref C) that supported the ALN will quickly become disillusioned.

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